Confirming governors for territories of Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines

Introduction

President Theodore Roosevelt wrote this letter to William H. Hunt, the Governor of Porto Rico just twelve days after he assumed the presidency following President William McKinley's assassination. In it, Roosevelt seeks to promote stability and continuity in the government, both internally and internationally.

During this transitional period, Roosevelt assures Hunt that the territorial governors would be given the "largest liberty of action possible, and the heartiest support on my part" and seeks advice on appointing a Secretary of State. "[I]t was the intention of President McKinley to appoint Mr. Charles Hartzell. He had tendered the place to him and it had been accepted. Naturally I desire to carry out this intention, but before doing so would wish to ask whether you know of any objection to it – and in asking you for your opinion I am sure I am doing precisely as the late President intended to do."

Hunt was recalled from Porto Rico in 1904 and made a judge on the U.S. District Court in Montana and later on the 9th Circuit of the Court of Appeals. William H. Taft ably administered the Philippines, despite an on-going insurgency that continued until 1916, and returned to join Roosevelt's cabinet as Secretary of War in 1904. Leonard Wood led a controversial reorganization of Cuban government and society during his governorship, which lasted until 1902. He later went to the Philippines and in 1906 was the leader of one of the largest massacres of insurgents in the Moro Province, where 600 men, women, and children became casualties. Despite the controversy surrounding Wood, Taft would appoint him Army Chief of Staff in 1910.

(Federal authorities changed the spelling from Puerto Rico to Porto Rico in 1899. It reverted to Puerto Rico in 1932.)

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Image

Personal . EXECUTIVE MANSION, WASHINGTON. September 26, 1901. My dear Governor Hunt: In dealing with the Philippines, Cuba and Porto Rico my purpose is to give Taft and Wood and yourent? the largest liberty of action possible and the heartiest support on my part. In taking up the question of the lesser appointments J want to consult especially with you three men, for I have the utmost confidence in each of you. I shall certainly not want any man whom anyone of you who has to be over or with that man disapproves of . I have written Senator Hanna at once about Howe, and I take it for granted there will be no difficulty in his appointment. It was suggested to me that a man named Elliott might be urged for appointment as Secretary of State, and J was told by Mr.Luce that he was not fit for the position. What do you think of this man -- if you know anything about him? As to the particular place of Secretary of State, it was the intention of President

Theodore Roosevelt to William H. Hunt, September 26, 1901 (Gilder Lehrman Collection, GLC05803)

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McKinley to appoint Mr Charles Hartzell. He had tendered the place to him and it had been accepted. Naturally I desire to carry out this intention, but before doing so would wish to ask whether you know of any objection to it -- and in asking you for your opinion J am sure J am doing precisely as the late President intended to do. I wish you would write me with the most absolute freedom as to any appointment that ought or ought not to be made, or as to any other question of policy. In dealing with our insular possessions and dependencies I feel that no consideration whatever must be allowed any weight save the consideration of getting the best possible service for the islands and therefore for our whole country. The problem is far too grave and to delicate to admit of any other course being pursued. Sincerely yours, Theodore Rooscelly-Hon .William H.Hunt . Governor of Porto Rico. San Juan, Porto Rico.